

M. Kurdys Comments to House Education Committee 9/17/2015

I sent a letter to Chair Price when these bills first came out. I believe most of you received it as well. If not, please let me know and I will make sure you get it.

Basically, I admire your efforts to address the very important topic of student's reading by the end of Third grade. But I cannot support these bills for three primary reasons:

- First, the recommendations are incredibly prescriptive and inappropriate for a local control state. Although many of the ideas are good, school districts should be making the decision of how to address educational issues in their district. The fact that most do not is an indicator of their lack of commitment to the goal. Quite frankly, my personal experience is that too many teachers and administrators believe not all kids can be taught to read by the end of Third grade and this belief becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children know when adults hold low expectations for them. You cannot legislate a change in attitude.

- Secondly, parents are key players in the success of students in school, but I do not believe you can legislate the type of relationship needed between parents, teachers and the schools. I believe this approach may well cause increased tension between schools and parents, which would be harmful for the children. We have already seen many school districts' unwillingness to respect parent's rights to opt their kids out of state assessments and offensive lessons. Again, you cannot legislate a change in attitude.

And finally, the bottom line of retaining children does not work. I sent you a link to excellent research by John Hattie which shows retention has a negative impact on student achievement, a negative impact. Children who are retained are less likely to graduate. One of the reasons you are working toward the goal of all kids reading is to improve graduation rates. This education policy is contradictory to your goal.

In reviewing your prescriptive solutions, one thing is clear. You do not force the elimination of the developmentally inappropriate Common Core Standards that actually impede learning for our youngest school children, You do not eliminate Whole Language, and though you mention phonics, you do not require all children be taught with a robust phonics curriculum, the developmentally appropriate, evidence based strategy for teach everyone how to read. Consider this quote:

"Regular readers of this foundation's publications and web site know we believe strongly that schools should utilize "best practices" that are supported by scientific research and should eschew classroom methods that do not work. In no domain of education is that contrast more vivid than in

teaching young children to read. No domain has been studied more intensely. None has yielded clearer and more definitive findings about what works and what does not. Yet no domain is more vulnerable to the perpetuation of bad ideas and failed methods. Three things are clear about early reading: First, it isn't being handled well in American schools. Four in ten of our fourth-graders lack basic reading skills. Tens of millions of adults are weak readers. Millions of children are needlessly classified as "disabled" when, in fact, their main problem is that nobody taught them to read when they were five and six years old.

Second, we know what works for nearly all children when it comes to imparting basic reading skills to them. (Phonics)

Third, we also know what doesn't work for most children. It's called "whole language."

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/6394/>

This quote is from Fordham Foundation in the year 2000! Recall Fordham, although they endorsed Common Core, clearly said the very best standards in the country were MA. You want all kids to read? The solution is easy. Get rid of Common Core. Replace the standards with proven standards, like MA. Require all teachers to learn and use phonics, primarily and exclusively. Implement a credible, non-intrusive state assessment, and publicly ridicule schools who do not teach all their Third Graders to read!